



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
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News Release

OXNARD AUTO DEALER PLEADS GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY IMPORTING EXOTIC FOREIGN CARS

Sports car from "Kill Bill, Vol. 1" one of the vehicles seized in case

SANTA ANA, Calif. — A Ventura County man pleaded guilty in federal court here Tuesday morning to conspiring to defraud the federal government and making false statements as part of a scheme to circumvent the nation's clean air laws and illegally import and sell luxury automobiles.

Today's plea by auto dealer Claus Graeter, 56, of Somis, stems from a joint investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Criminal Investigations Division of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Inspector General's Office of the United States Department of Transportation.

According to court documents, Graeter ran an Oxnard-based company called GC Motor Corporation that imported exotic foreign cars, including Lotus Elises, Mercedes Benz Gelandewagens, BMW Z8s, and Range Rovers. The cars, which were built for use in Europe, did not conform to U.S. emissions or safety standards.

As part of the investigation, ICE agents seized 20 illegally imported vehicles. One of those vehicles was the right-hand drive Nissan "Fairlady" Z featured in the first "Kill Bill" film. The film's director, Quentin Tarantino, was not implicated in the scheme.

"This dealer courted customers all over the country, including in Orange County," said Loraine Brown, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. "It's a classic case of buyer beware. If someone offers to sell you a high-end imported car at a remarkable price, do your homework. If you buy an imported car under the table, you not only risk losing the vehicle, but if you're part of the criminal scheme, you risk being prosecuted as well."

Most of the vehicles seized in the case have now been returned to their buyers, with the stipulation they must be sold for export. Should the buyers decline to take the cars back, the vehicles will be put up for public auction, also under the condition they must be sold overseas.

Investigators say Graeter used several means to illegally import the vehicles into the United States. Court documents show his ruses included falsifying the information on forms submitted to ICE, the EPA, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In that paperwork, Graeter would

falsely claim the cars were for temporary personal use and not for resale, and that they were worth far less than their actual value.

Graeter's sentencing is set for April 4, 2005. He faces a maximum penalty of seven years in prison and a \$500,000 fine.

Editor's Note: ICE b-roll of the vehicles seized as part of this case is being made available under an agreement with KABC-TV. Watch City News Service for an advisory including details on the video feed, which will be sent out over TELCO loop 948614.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.